

## Filling the Language Gaps through Memory Books

Teachers are asking "how do I prepare students for assessments *and* help them view themselves as writers?" It's a fine balance. Skill-based instruction is important, but we also must include the essential element of motivation. From the start we must convince students that writing is worthwhile and that their oral vocabulary and reading experiences give them tools to express themselves. Then their skills will grow. This grant proposes to focus students' writings on topics that are of relevance to their lives. It will also steer the finished writings to a finished and published state.

**"Writing is hard because it is a struggle of thought, feeling and imagination to find expression clear enough for the task at hand."  
~ Carl Nagin**

We must prove to students that each has something important to say. The National Council of Teachers of English identifies writing's primary role as an opportunity for students to **"learn about themselves and their world and communicate their insights to others."** That's the secret to making the skill instruction work.

This project will focus on students' communication through writings, photos, and multi media presentations. By using the students' writings, the teacher will be able to assess what students *don't know* and gear the instruction towards those topics. The writings will have meaning to the student as the topics are based on activities of the fourth grade year. All these papers will be compiled into a bound memory book giving each student a great written memory for years to come. If we begin where students are we will be amazed at how far

they can go. Students' writings will also be published on the web. Posting the work on secure, select sites will offer an easy and effective way of publishing students' work. Publishing student writing encourages the reluctant writer, strengthens kids' self-confidence, rewards interest, and promotes a positive attitude toward literature. The minute kids think their work will be published, they take greater pride in the result.

### Narrative description of how technology is currently used in my classroom:

I teach fourth graders at the American Falls Intermediate School in American Falls. During the day, I teach two reading classes, one spelling and language arts class, science and Idaho History.

The students are currently beginning each day with keyboarding lessons for ten minutes. I have found that students need keyboarding abilities far more than they need to review handwriting; therefore, we begin the day with a short typing lesson. However, we only have access to the computer lab for those ten minutes each day. With this proposal, we would have an AlphaSmart keyboard for each student to not only practice keyboarding but also to use to type their writing projects.

I also use the Read Naturally Program in which students use computer technology to hear and practice reading passages to enhance their reading fluency as well as speech production. This program provides a method to improve reading fluency. Most struggling readers have fluency



problems and spend little time reading. Students become fluent readers by reading. Yet in our elementary schools, students read an average of only seven to eight minutes a day (U.S. Department of Education). Struggling readers read even less. This complicates the problem and is not nearly enough time to become proficient at something as difficult as reading. The Read Naturally passages are factual articles which promote learning information while practicing their reading. It has been documented that through this program students will gain on an average of 2 words per week in their reading fluency of words per minute.

In our language class we focus on reading and writing. Students write every day, whether it is as simple as a journal entry or the production of a writing piece. Computers are often used in the final production. Students love to type their stories on the computers and add clipart, colored font, or borders. The big drawback is that there are not enough computers in the classroom. Time slots are not available in the one computer lab to be able to type, edit, and add graphics. This project will answer that problem by providing an AlphaSmart at each student's desk. With the AlphaSmart students can type their article, send it by wireless to the laptop computer. Since the students' articles are all typed when sent to the computer, students only need a short time on the computer editing and adding graphics or pictures.

I also publish a monthly newsletter that goes home to the parents highlighting students' activities, work, news, and photos. This is a great way to publish student work. However, we can not acknowledge more than two or three students each month. With this proposal the entire class can have their writing published on the Web.

I have a digital camera at school to use in my classroom. Taking pictures always fascinates the students. At times we use these pictures as topics for writing and other times they are used to illustrate the stories, artwork, or keep students interest. For example, when we studied the earthworm, we took pictures as students examined worms and for the final project we took pictures of the students lying on the floor in shapes which formed the letters for the word "worms". The students' writings, pictures, worm-picture-title were all put out on the wall in the hall for other students to see. Pictures generate a lot of interest. Students stop by and read what we have there. My students go out and read what is written there everyday. What an innovative way to practice English.

Through a grant that I received a couple of years ago, I was able to purchase a projector and a Wireless Mimio which turns my classroom white board into a *interactive smartboard*. I use the projector constantly to show information from the computer, packaged lessons from our Science textbook, and using the interactive Mimio we are able to review test information in the form of games such as *Jeopardy* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. Students gain a more information through these interactive sessions, competing and working together to ready themselves for tests.



### **Narrative description of how my use of technology has impacted my students.**

The examples described above help keep students' interest. The use of technology is very appealing to students. I have found that I have better success in motivating my students with lessons that use technology than I do with lessons that do not. For example in a past lesson in Science we were studying the eye. We had conducted some experiments with vision, but the activity that excited the students the most was a web-site on the cow eye. I found a web site: ([http://www.exploratorium.edu/learning\\_studio/cow\\_eye/](http://www.exploratorium.edu/learning_studio/cow_eye/)) which offers text and video on the eye. It is about a fifth grade reading level. The most enhancing part was the videos. A young girl dissects a cow's eye in these short videos. She takes the students step by step through the parts of the eye, discussing the purpose of each part of the eye. My students were spell-bound and excited to watch, but the best part was the amount of information that they took in from these videos. I had done a pre-knowledge assessment and then again after the students had completed the information on the web-site and found that their knowledge on the eye had increased. I have a projector which is hooked up to the computer, thus making lessons like this visible and enhanced for all students to participate in.

Another example of how technology has impacted my students has come about because of the Idaho Standards Achievement Test. Taking the students results and plugging this information into the Plato software has individualized the remediation for students in Reading, Math, and Language Arts. Students enjoy the one-on-one and immediate feedback that the computer programs give. The use of computer software offers this immediate feedback that I as a teacher can not always get to at the moment. Using computer software also helps me to track the students progress and needs. Through the information of the ISATs, I have found that my students need more practice in the Language Arts areas. This project will provide a way to reinforce and teach grammar skills that the students need to communicate more effectively and to progress on their ISATs.

### **Narrative description of what I am proposing to purchase and how it will enable me to use technology in an innovative manner to enhance learning in my students.**

I recognize the value of technology in my classroom, and the importance of technology in the future of my students. I need additional technological aids to help motivate my students so that they become engaged, active participants in the learning process. I realize the need that my students have in enhancing their writing and grammar skills. The ISATs have borne out this fact. Using the activities which are experienced throughout the fourth grade year as prompts for writing is a step in the goal of filling the language gaps. Using the AlphaSmarts, computer, and camera, students will write their individual reflections and illustrate them with pictures they have taken of the topic. I as the teacher will focus in on each students' language gaps and proceed to fill those gaps through class and individual instruction. The finished products will be published and bound, plus the stories will also be published on the Web. This grant will fulfill three goals.

### **Goal One: Purchase a classroom set of AlphaSmart keyboards and a central laptop.**



Through this project I want to increase the grammar and writing skills of my students. The AlphaSmarts will provide each student a keyboard at their desk. They will use the AlphaSmart for keyboarding skills and writing stories or reports. When students are finished with their writings they will “beam” their article to the networked laptop. The students can then go to one of the computers in the classroom and edit their paper and add graphics or pictures. I don’t have enough computers available for all the students to work at a computer. This project cuts down on the amount of time that a students need to be at a computer. We are able to go to the computer lab for a half hour a week. Since the students have already typed their paper and “beamed” it to the network in the classroom we are then able to productively use the half-hour in the computer lab and have a finished project. One of the great things about the AlphaSmart and a Laptop is that they are portable. We will be able to take them outdoors or on field trips with us to begin our productions. The laptop will also be used to store our pictures that students take for their memory books. With a color printer attached to the laptop we will be able to publish a final professional looking paper for each student to put in their Fourth Grade Memory Book.

**Goal Two: Purchase a color printer, cartridges, laminate, and binding materials.**

Through writing on topics that are important to the students they will learn about themselves and their world and communicate these insights to others. The memory books will be a compilation of students’ writings throughout the year. At the end of the year students will have a bound production of all their articles. These student writings use activities from our fourth grade year as topics. The memories of their fourth grade year will be captured in word and pictures. My goal is to “light the fire of ideas”, let them express themselves through writing, look for their language gaps, compare these findings to grade level standards and choose what to teach. The student “gaps” will guide the language curriculum and help students progress in the grammar areas in which they are lacking. The memory books will help me as a teacher to focus on students’ language gaps that are evident in their writings as well as give them a written memory.

An example of the memory topics is a writing that I had students do about our field trip to the planetarium, museum, and the Shoshone Falls. After our trip students did a *spider graph* dividing the field trip into four areas of focus. They then were able to write about each of these topics and organize them into a completed paper. We added pictures taken from the our field trip. Now students have their first “memory” story that will go into their Fourth Grade Memory Books. The holidays lend naturally to writing, pictures, and memories, as well as topics from our classroom studies, and field trips.

The color printer, laminate materials, binding, and scrap booking graphics will be used to produce each memory book.

**Goal Three: Subscriptions to Web sites for writing prompts, ideas, publishing and critiques.**

This proposal will allow our class to use two web sites that publish students’ writings and give students an opportunity to write with writers. Suggestions, prompts, and ideas will be given to students about their writings. Giving students an opportunity to have their works published on the Web will also give them a meaningful social context in which to display their work and talents. These web sites are secure and safe.

## Quest Foundation for Education Grant Expenditure Plan

Item	Cost	Description
20 AlphaSmart Wireless Keyboards @ \$200 each	\$4000.00	To be used for keyboarding skills and typing writing assignments
Wireless Laptop	\$1200.00	Used to send students' work through wireless mode. Laptop networked.
Color printer and cartridges	\$500.00	Used to print students' finished writings
Batteries	\$22.00	Each AlphaSmart requires 3 AA batteries
Laminate material, bindings, scrapbooking notions	\$100.00	Used to laminate pictures, covers, and add decorations to some of the pages
Writing Web Sites ABCteach.com 2 years @ \$60 Edhelper.com 2 years @\$80.00	\$140.00	These web sites are secure sites that will publish students work as well as give students an opportunity to write with the writers.
<b>Total Request</b>	<b>\$5962.00</b>	